

## Information Status and Prosody - Production and Perception in German

Christine T. Röhr

lfl Phonetik, University of Cologne

The dimension of *given* versus *new* information is a central part in the investigation of information structure. I am particularly interested in the relation between *givenness* (also called *information status*) and prosody based on a cognitive *activation cost* model (e.g. proposed by Chafe 1994).

It is commonly assumed for West Germanic languages that new referents are marked by pitch accents and given referents get deaccented (e.g. Cruttenden 2006) whereas the prosody of accessible referents is a matter of some debate. However, several studies provide evidence that it is rather the tonal configuration which is important for encoding a referent's information status (e.g. Kohler 1991, Pierrehumbert & Hirschberg 1990), and that different types of accessible information demand different accent types as linguistic markers (cf. Baumann 2006, Baumann & Grice 2006, Schumacher & Baumann 2010).

In order to prove the basic assumption that (stepwise) changes in the degree of a referent's givenness are reflected in corresponding (stepwise) changes in its degree of prosodic prominence we conducted a production experiment on read German (Röhr & Baumann 2010). The reading material elicits four different levels of givenness by varying a referent's salience in diverse discourse contexts due to explicit or implicit previous mention. Results reveal a significantly increasing number of pitch accents as well as higher and later accentual peaks with a decreasing degree of a referent's givenness.

To validate the effect of prosody on the listener's perception of a referent's level of givenness, two follow-up perception experiments have been carried out on a selection of target referents of the production study both in sentences in isolation and in context (Röhr & Baumann 2011). The main findings are that the presence or absence of accent, different accent positions (nuclear, prenuclear) and different accent types (determining factors: tonal value of starred element and presence or absence of an early peak), significantly influence a referent's perceived degree of givenness. Accordingly, the accent positions (including no accentuation) differ significantly in their appropriateness as prosodic markers of different types of information status.

Taken together, the production and perception experiments on read German indicate that a referent's prosodic encoding alone can serve as the decisive cue for decoding its level of givenness. Furthermore, the results provide evidence for the relevance of different intermediate types of information status between the poles *given* and *new*, suggesting a difference in their cognitive activation.

## References

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